

# News Release

# Senator Pete V. Domenici

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## DOMENICI SUPPORTS RENEWED ANIMAS-LA PLATA EFFORT

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Senator Pete Domenici today announced that he has cosponsored a new bill to authorize the construction of the Animas-La Plata water project, an undertaking that has significant water implications for New Mexico.

Domenici is a member of both the Senate Indian Affairs Committee and the Energy and Natural Resources Committee that today jointly received testimony on S. 2508, the **Colorado Ute Indian Water Settlement Act Amendments of 2000**.

Domenici, who is recovering from neck surgery, issued a written statement to the committee to confirm support for S.2508. Introduced May 4 by Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-Colo.), the bill would settle negotiated claims by the Colorado Ute Tribes on the Animas and La Plata Rivers, while safeguarding irrigators and other water users.

"I believe this legislation reflects the cooperative efforts among the parties to secure needed water supplies in Colorado and New Mexico. I hope we have finally reached the resolution we need to move forward with this project, which has been kicked around for far too long, and can finally become law," Domenici said.

"In New Mexico, the project will also provide needed water for the Navajo community of Shiprock and protect San Juan-Chama project water, on which tribes, towns and cities along the Rio Grande rely," he said. "I also recognize that some technical corrections to this legislation may be necessary to further protect some of New Mexico's water interests. I stand ready to work within the committee to achieve them."

The legislation is designed to satisfy the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute water claims granted in 1986. The bill represents a compromise that allows construction of a smaller water project than one previously authorized by Congress, while also recognizing the environmental impact studies already completed for the larger project. It would not negate the previously authorized project until the smaller project is completed.

Campbell has reported that S.2508 is supported by the affected American Indian tribes, as well as the states of New Mexico and Colorado, and other stakeholders.

S.2508 continues to incorporate provisions Domenici gained in 1998 Animas-La Plata legislation that was considered in the Senate. Specifically, Domenici pushed for provisions that allow the State Engineer to transfer any portion of the New Mexico water rights permit to the beneficiaries or the Interstate Stream Commission. In 1956, the State of New Mexico set aside 49,510 acre feet of water in anticipation of the completion of the Animas-La Plata project. Approximately 30,800 acre feet could potentially be developed by the San Juan Water Commission, with the rest being utilized by the Navajo Nation and a New Mexico conservancy district. Domenici also assured that the bill protects Navajo Nation water and provides water to Shiprock.

Tom Turney, New Mexico's State Engineer, testified in favor of the bill at today's joint hearing.